

Congressman



Bernie Sanders'

VERMONT REPORT

Fall 2005

1-800-339-9834

www.bernie.house.gov

Congress must do more for families, seniors and workers

Dear Fellow Vermonter,

The purpose of this newsletter is to inform you about some of the major problems that Congress is addressing, how these challenges are affecting Vermonters, and what we can do about them.

I also want to seek your ideas about the future – about the direction you think Congress should take – so please fill out the short post-age-paid survey inside and let me know what you think. (You can fill out this survey online instead, at www.bernie.house.gov/survey.)

The recent tragic events in New Orleans and on the Gulf Coast have shown us how important it is to have a federal government that is capable of responding to the needs of all Americans. And not just for hurricanes and floods. As a nation we need to work together to solve the major crises facing our people – the disintegration of our health care system, the degradation of the environment, the loss of good paying jobs and the need to make sure that all of our young people get the quality education they need from childcare through college.

As always, my office stands ready to assist you with any problems that you might have with Medicare, Social Security, Medicaid, prescription drugs, veterans' programs, foreign travel or other federal matters. Please give my office a call at our toll free number, 1-800-339-9834. Also visit my website, www.bernie.house.gov, for frequently updated information.

Sincerely yours,

Bernie
Bernard Sanders

U.S. Congressman

Saving the Middle Class

Sadly, the middle class in America is in decline. While technology is exploding and worker productivity is increasing, wages for the aver-

elsewhere who are paid as little as 30 cents an hour. In the last five years, our country has lost 2.8 million good-paying manufacturing jobs

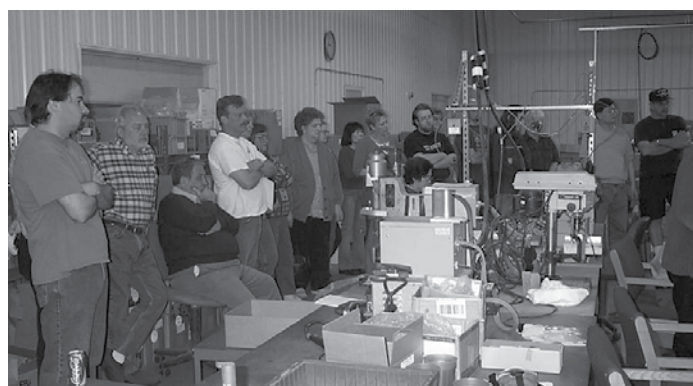
and we are now on the verge of losing millions of good-paying information technology jobs.

To reverse this trend, Congressman Sanders has been leading the opposition in Congress to harmful trade agreements like NAFTA and Permanent Normal Trade

Relations with China, which make it highly profitable for corporate America to throw U.S. workers out on the street and move manufacturing plants abroad.

He has also vigorously opposed President Bush's tax policies, which have provided hundreds of billions in tax breaks to millionaires and billionaires, run up the deficit, and led to

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York Capacitor in Winooski is shutting down and laying off 125 workers because it can't compete with cheap labor countries. This is just one more American company whose workers are paying the price for our disastrous trade policies. Here York Capacitor workers discuss these issues with Bernie when he visited their plant last spring.

age American worker have declined by 11% since 1973. More and more middle-class Americans are now working longer hours for lower wages.

And if we do not change current economic trends it is likely that for the first time in modern American history, our kids will have a lower standard of living than we do.

While the middle class shrinks, poverty is increasing. Since 2001, over 5 million more Americans have entered the ranks of the poor. Disgracefully, in the United States today over 17.5% of our children live in poverty, the highest rate in any industrialized country.

While most Americans are having a hard time keeping their heads above water economically, the wealthiest people in our country have never had it so good. The gap between the rich and the poor is growing wider, with the richest one percent now owning more wealth than the bottom 90%. Last year, as part of this trend, the CEOs of the Forbes 500 largest corporations saw, on average, a 54% increase in their compensation, while the average American was lucky if his/her income kept up with inflation.

There are a number of factors contributing to the middle class squeeze. Clearly, one of the major reasons is our failed trade policy, which forces American workers to compete against people in China and

Our Veterans Deserve Better

It is not acceptable that the men and women who put their lives on the line to defend our country are not receiving the health care and other benefits they were promised.

In Vermont, as in many other parts of the country, veterans who are in need of health care are being placed on waiting lists. In addition, 400,000 disabled veterans are still affected by the offset between their military pension and their V.A. disability benefits.

Given the inadequate V.A. budget that the Republican Congressional leadership recently passed, Bernie is very concerned that the tens of thousands of veterans who are and will be returning from Iraq and Afghanistan will not get the health care they need. These soldiers often suffer from serious medical

problems, including amputations and brain injuries. Studies also indicate that many of them are coming back with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at rates that are even higher than during the Vietnam War.

Congressman Sanders is working with the American Legion, the VFW, the DAV, Vietnam Veterans of America and other veterans' organizations to make certain that our veterans are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve, and that their needs are adequately funded. He is a co-sponsor of HR 515, which would provide automatic mandatory funding for veterans' health benefits so that every eligible veteran could receive the health care he or she is entitled to.

What should Congress do?

Please fill out the postage-paid survey inside...

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Official Business

M.C.
Presorted Standard

Health Care in Vermont

Making Health and Dental Care Accessible for All Vermonters

Most Americans know that our current health care system is disintegrating. Today, as health care costs are skyrocketing, almost 46 million Americans lack any health insurance, many small businesses are no longer able to provide health insurance for their workers, and, when health insurance is provided, workers are being asked to pay more and more of the cost. Meanwhile, as a nation, we spend twice as much per capita as any other country. Further, in Vermont and throughout America, millions of people are unable to access dental care.

All Vermonters should be entitled to health care as a right of citizenship. During the last several years Bernie has taken some important steps to move Vermont in that direction.

As a result of his efforts, three health centers in the state of Vermont have received designations as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs).

This new status will mean that every year millions of dollars in federal funds will be available to provide primary health care to all Vermonters in those regions, regardless of income or ability to pay. These facilities provide high quality care for those Vermonters with private insurance, Medicare, Medicaid, and those who have no insurance at all. These FQHCs will also treat lower-income Vermonters on a sliding scale basis, and make dental care, mental health counseling and inexpensive prescription drugs available for all patients.

While FQHCs in Burlington and the St. Johnsbury area have been in existence for many years, Bernie has recently helped obtain FQHC status for the Northern Tier Centers for Health based in Richford, Little Rivers Health Care based in Wells River, and the Community Health Centers of the Rutland Region.

"Through FQHCs we are making real progress in providing high-quality, affordable

health care to tens of thousands of Vermonters," Congressman Sanders said. "My hope is that, in the near future, we will have FQHCs in every region of the state."

Missisquoi Valley Union High School in Swanton, and at community health centers in Hardwick and Bellows Falls.

"Every child and every adult in our state, regardless



Bernie meets with the Bradford staff of the Little Rivers Health Center. He has helped community health centers bring in substantial federal funding and become FQHCs.

He has also brought into the state substantial federal funding to establish dental clinics in the Wheeler School in Burlington, Mt. Anthony Union High School in Bennington,

of income, should be able to receive dental care. While much more needs to be done, we are making real progress in this area," Rep. Sanders said.

Transportation

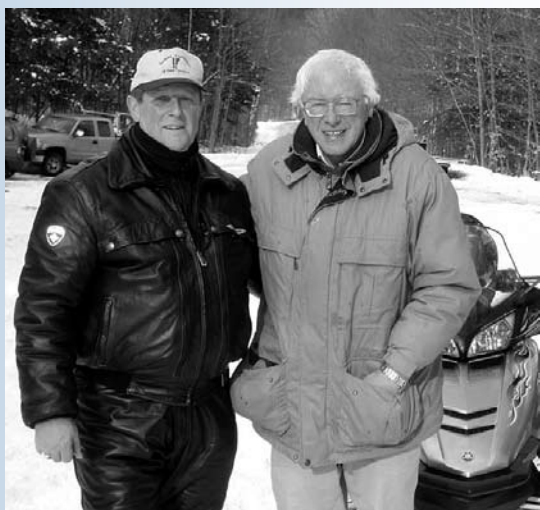
Protecting Our Infrastructure

One of the major lessons to be learned from the tragedy in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast is that this country cannot continue to ignore our very serious infrastructure problems. Bernie recently voted for a \$286 billion highway transportation bill that, although far from perfect, begins to address some of the major problems that our country and state face in terms of roads, bridges and rail enhancements.

Vermont did as well as it did in this transportation bill in large measure because Senator Jim

Jeffords is the senior minority member on the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. Senator Jeffords, Senator Leahy and Congressman Sanders worked together so that Vermont will get an average of \$175 million a year for the next five years from the Federal Highway Administration, a major increase from the average of \$125 million a year it got in the last transportation bill.

Among many other benefits for Vermont, the bill includes \$100 million for highway, road and rail improvements for western Vermont; \$30 million toward repair of bridges in small towns; \$25 million for improvements to Vermont's interstate highways; and \$18 million to complete the Missisquoi Bay Bridge. It also includes \$5.3 million for a cross-Vermont snowmobile/bicycle/equestrian four-season trail.



Bernie inspects snowmobiles with Bryant Watson, executive director of VAST. Bernie secured \$5.3 million for a four season recreation trail that will run from Swanton to St. Johnsbury.

Sign up for

The BERNIE 'buzz'

Get periodic email updates providing a fresh perspective on events in Washington.

Go to www.bernie.house.gov/buzz.htm to sign up.

Saving the Middle Class

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major cutbacks in veterans' funding, education, affordable housing, LIHEAP and many other programs desperately needed by ordinary Americans.

Instead of giving huge sums in corporate welfare to large corporations that are moving our jobs abroad, Congress should be

helping small and medium-sized businesses who want to create decent-paying jobs in America. At the same time, Congress should raise the minimum wage to a living wage, so that no American who works 40 hours a week lives in poverty.

Social Security

'No' to Social Security Privatization

Congressman Sanders has held six Town Meetings on Social Security, attended by over 1100 Vermonters. The almost unanimous response

that he has heard at these meetings is, "Do not allow President Bush to privatize any part of Social Security." Bernie agrees! Despite the President's often

repeated claims, Social Security is **not** going broke and is **not** bankrupt. According to major studies by the Social Security Administration and the Congressional Budget Office, Social Security will be able to pay out every nickel owed to every eligible American for the next 36 to 46 years, at which point it will pay out approximately 75% of benefits. With only modest changes in the system, such as removing the cap which currently allows those who earn over \$90,000 to avoid paying their fair share of this program, Social Security will remain strong for our kids, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Representative Sanders has been a leading voice in Congress to protect Social Security. Far from saving Social Security, the President's plan would cut Social Security benefits by up to 40%, add trillions to our national debt, and result in increased poverty for seniors. "Social Security is the most successful anti-poverty program in history," Bernie emphasized. "We must continue to do everything we can to protect Social Security, which provides dignity and financial security not only for older Americans, but for millions of others who are disabled and who receive survivors' benefits."



Bernie discussing Social Security at his Congressional Town Meeting in Brattleboro. Over 1100 people have attended six Town Meetings on Social Security across our state and, overwhelmingly oppose the President's effort to privatize portions of Social Security.

The War in Iraq

Time to be straight with the American people...

In October of 2002, Congressman Bernie Sanders voted against giving the President authority to go to war against Iraq. Bernie believed that the U.N. inspectors should have been given more time to determine whether, in fact, Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, as claimed by the Bush administration. Subsequent events, of course, have shown that there were no such weapons.

Congressman Sanders applauds the bravery and courage

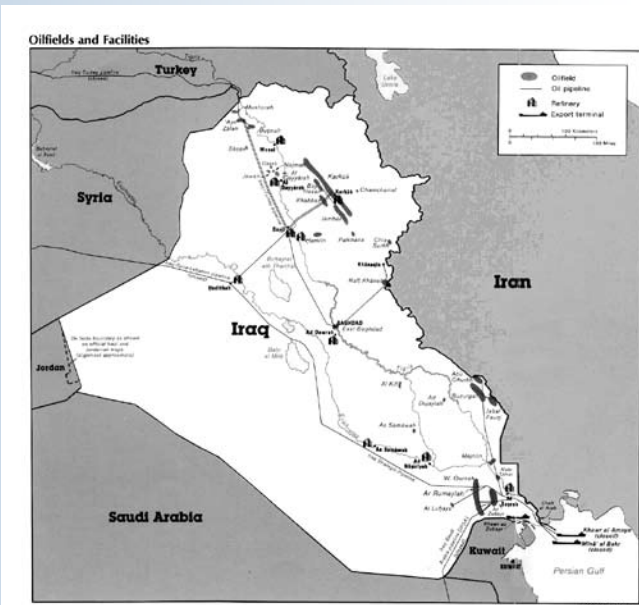
of thousands of Iraqi casualties, it's time for the President to come clean with the American people and provide us with an exit strategy that includes a timetable for bringing our troops home.

"In my view, we must refocus our attention on Al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden and those terrorists who killed 3000 innocent Americans on September 11, 2001," Bernie said recently. "While the United States and other major countries should continue

to provide financial and logistical support so that the Iraqi government and military can defend their people, the President must give us a timetable for withdrawing our American

troops as soon as feasible. At the same time we must rebuild the multinational alliance that will be necessary if we are to defeat international terrorism."

of the Vermont National Guard and the other American soldiers who have answered their country's call. Now, with some 1900 American soldiers killed – including 17 Vermonters; some 14,000 wounded; and tens



Courtesy of The General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

Consumer Protection

Credit Cards: Going broke has never been so easy

"We need to end outrageous credit card fees and interest rates" says Congressman Sanders

Thousands of Vermont families are carrying credit card debt of \$10,000 or more, with little hope of paying it off soon.

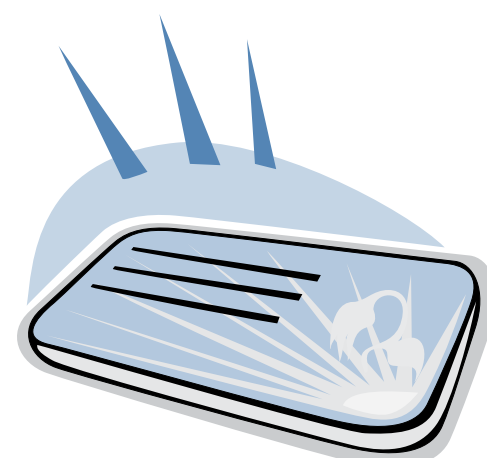
off – but only for the banks. Meanwhile, Vermont families and people all across the nation are caught in a debt trap which seems inescapable and sometimes leads to bankruptcy.

That's why Congressman Sanders has introduced legislation to end the 'bait and switch' scam of the credit card companies. His legislation prevents credit card companies, who send out 5 billion solicitations each year, from raising interest rates if consumers are paying their bill on time. It would also prohibit

credit card companies from raising the interest rate on any pre-existing unpaid balance, with any allowable increase applying only to new charges.

What's worse – at a time when interest rates have hovered at record lows – credit card companies charge many consumers exorbitant interest rates. And if customers are late by just one day in paying, the credit card issuers charge outrageously high late fees.

It should come as no surprise therefore, that credit card issuers made a record \$30 billion in profits last year. Charging excessive interest rates and sky-high fees pays



Energy & the Economy

We Need a Bold New Energy Policy

Soaring gas prices at the pump are taking a larger and larger bite out of the budgets of American families, especially those in rural areas like Vermont where workers often have to drive long distances to their jobs. High energy



Congressman Bernie Sanders discusses soaring gas prices at a Burlington gas station. He is supporting legislation which will stop oil companies from gouging consumers.

prices will also be devastating for seniors, and all Americans who heat their homes with oil and gas this winter.

"To my mind, it is incomprehensible that the Energy Bill recently signed by the President, which included billions in subsidies for the big energy compa-

nies, had virtually nothing in it to address the major energy crisis we are now facing," Congressman Sanders said. "The time is long overdue for Congress to act and act boldly."

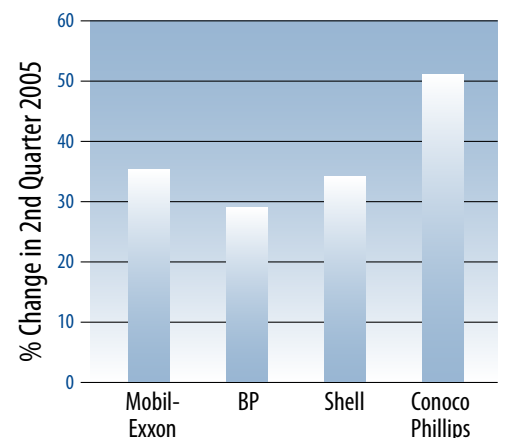
As retail gas and oil prices soar to record-breaking levels, the giant oil companies are enjoying huge profits. Just in the last quarter alone, Exxon-Mobil had profits of \$7 billion, Royal Dutch Shell had profits of \$5 billion, and Marathon Oil achieved a 91% earnings growth – and that was *before* the huge price increases we saw after Katrina. "Congress must be vigilant in making certain in the midst of the current volatility in the oil industry

that the big oil companies do not rip off the American people with artificially inflated prices," Bernie said. He also wants the President to take action against OPEC, the oil-producing cartel, which has illegally limited production, which in turn has pushed prices higher.

Representative Sanders is an original sponsor of HR 3544, which is a comprehensive approach not only for bringing oil prices down now, but for making our country more energy-efficient and less dependent on foreign oil in the long term. He also believes that the technology is currently available to break our dependence on fossil fuel and move us forward in a significant way into such sustainable energies as solar, biomass, wind and hydrogen fuel cells.

Bernie also will be working to make certain that no Vermonter goes cold this winter. Unfortunately, despite huge price increases for home heating fuels, President Bush proposed a budget that actually *cut* the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which provides heating subsidies for over 19,000 Vermont households. Bernie will be working hard to significantly *increase* LIHEAP funding so every Vermonter can stay warm this winter.

Windfall Oil Profits



We can cut heating oil and gas prices

Congressman Sanders and Rep. Peter DeFazio of Oregon have introduced a bill, HR 3544, to drive down fuel costs and improve energy efficiency. Their plan includes:

- Releasing enough oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to combat skyrocketing gas prices
- Presidential authority to impose price controls on gas sales to prevent runaway prices and profits
- A windfall profits tax
- A moratorium on mergers between petroleum and crude oil producers
- A significant tax credit for the purchase of fuel-efficient vehicles
- Increases in average fuel economy standards for cars and light trucks.

Reflections on Katrina and New Orleans

As this newsletter is being set into print, emergency workers are still helping survivors of Katrina leave New Orleans and still uncovering the bodies of those who died in the hurricane and subsequent flood. The death toll is unknown, but local officials are estimating it could be in the thousands.

What are some of the lessons we can learn from the tragedy in New Orleans and the horrific suffering that all of us observed there?

It cannot be denied that we depend on the federal government to help us out in need – whether it is a destructive hurricane, a foreign threat, a terrorist attack, the poverty in which too many children live, or health care and retirement insecurity. If only our national leaders had paid more attention to what the federal government should do for its citizens, New Orleans' physical infrastructure would have been in much better condition and the first response to the disaster would not have been so tragically inept.

Second, it is imperative that we make fundamental changes to our national priorities. Instead of spending hundreds of billions on tax breaks for people who don't need them, and billions more on

outdated weapons systems, we must focus our resources on truly protecting the American people. Katrina should provide a wake-up call about the true destructive power of nature. If we ignore looming environmental crises, such as global warming, we may indeed face natural disasters of a magnitude even greater than the devastation we have experienced on the Gulf Coast. The truth is that we can improve our economy and the safety of our people by vigorously protecting our environment and by working to undo the environmental degradation that has occurred in recent years.

Third, we Americans are a good and generous people. In Vermont, our hearts have gone out – as have many, many truckloads of supplies – to the people of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. Vermonters from all walks of life, including Vermont National Guard members who have only recently returned from service overseas, are pitching in to help our fellow Americans in their hour of need. We deserve a government as concerned about the elderly and the poor of New Orleans as most of our citizens are, a government as caring as the people of this nation.

Can We Help?

Issues

If you have concerns or opinions about federal legislation or policy, call our office in Burlington, toll free, at **1-800-339-9834**. To better represent Vermonters my office needs to hear what you think.

Constituent Services

If you need help with federal benefits such as Social Security, veterans' benefits, immigration issues, federal housing programs or Medicare, call the same number: **1-800-339-9834**. Our Constituent Advocates are knowledgeable about these programs, as well as military matters, questions about foreign travel, and Vermont state benefits such as Medicaid and Fuel Assistance.

Flags

Our office can make available, at modest cost, a flag that has flown above the Capitol. Order a flag at www.bernie.house.gov by clicking on "Constituent Services." Or call our Burlington office.

Other help

Organizations or agencies seeking federal grants can get help too. Check our website, www.bernie.house.gov and click on "Constituent Services." If you know a young person wishing to attend a Service Academy, tell him/her to contact my office.

Contact Us

Write to Bernie at:

Congressman Bernie Sanders
1 Church St. 2nd Floor
Burlington, VT 05401
(Note: Do not send mail to the Washington office as security measures create significant delays in delivery.)

Or call:

1-800-339-9834

Or click into:

www.bernie.house.gov

Email: In order to more efficiently process the overwhelming amount of electronic mail we receive we use a webform system. To email Bernie use the webform in the "Contact Bernie" section of his home page.

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